

**ALAN  
PATON**

**TALES  
FROM  
A  
TROUBLED  
LAND**

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A TROUBLED LAND



**BOOKS BY ALAN PATON**

**TALES FROM A TROUBLED LAND**

**SOUTH AFRICA IN TRANSITION**

**TOO LATE THE PHALAROPE**

**CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY**



ALAN PATON

**TALES  
FROM A  
TROUBLED  
LAND**

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# LIFE

## FOR A LIFE

THE DOCTOR had closed up the ugly hole in Flip's skull so that his widow, and her brothers and sisters, and their wives and husbands and children, and Flip's own brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands and children, could come and stand for a minute and look down on the hard stony face of the master of Kroon, one of the richest farmers of the whole Karroo. The cars kept coming and going, the police, the doctor, the newspaper men, the neighbours from near and far.

All the white women were in the house, and all the white men outside. An event like this, the violent death of one of themselves, drew them together in an instant, so that all the world might see that they were one, and that they would not rest till justice had been done. It was this standing there, this drawing together, that kept the brown people in their small stone houses, talking in low voices; and their fear communicated itself to their children, so that there was no need to silence them. Now and then one of them would leave the houses to relieve his needs in the bushes, but otherwise there was no movement on this side of the valley.

TALES  
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Each family sat in its house, at a little distance from each front door, watching with anxious fascination the goings and the comings of the white people standing in front of the big house.

Then the white predikant came from Poort, you could tell him by the black hat and the black clothes. He shook hands with Big Baas Flip's sons, and said words of comfort to them. Then all the men followed him into the house, and after a while the sound of the slow determined singing was carried across the valley, to the small stone houses on the other side, to Enoch Maarman, head-shepherd of Kroon, and his wife Sara, sitting just inside the door of their own house. Maarman's anxiety showed itself in the movements of his face and hands, and his wife knew of his condition but kept her face averted from it. Guilt lay heavily upon them both, because they had hated Big Baas Flip, not with clenched fists and bared teeth, but, as befitted people in their station, with salutes and deference.

Sara suddenly sat erect.

—They are coming, she said.

They watched the four men leave the big stone house, and take the path that led to the small stone houses, and both could feel the fear rising in them. Their guilt weighed down on them all the more heavily because they felt no grief. They felt all the more afraid because the show of grief might have softened the harshness of the approaching ordeal. Someone must pay for so terrible a crime, and if not the one who did it, then who better than the one who could not grieve. That morning Maarman had stood

hat in hand before Baas Gysbert, who was Big Baas Flip's eldest son, and had said to him, *my people are sorry to hear of this terrible thing*. And Baas Gysbert had given him the terrible answer, *that could be so*.

Then Sara said to him, Robbertse is one.

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He nodded. He knew that Robbertse was one, the big detective with the temper that got out of hand, so that reddish foam would come out of his mouth, and he would hold a man by the throat till one of his colleagues would shout at him to let the man go. Sara's father, who was one of the wisest men in all the district of Poort, said that he could never be sure whether Robbertse was mad or only pretending to be, but that it didn't really matter, because whichever it was, it was dangerous.

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Maarman and his wife stood up when two of the detectives came to the door of the small stone house. One was Robbertse, but both were big men and confident. They wore smart sports jackets and grey flannels, and grey felt hats on their heads. They came in and kept their hats on their heads, looking round the small house with the air of masters. They spoke to each other as though there were nobody standing there waiting to be spoken to.

Then Robbertse said, you are Enoch Maarman?

—Yes, baas.

—The head-shepherd?

—Yes, baas.

—Who are the other shepherds?

Enoch gave him the names, and Robbertse sat down on one of the chairs, and wrote the names in his book.

Then he tilted his hat back on his head and said, has anyone of these men ever been in gaol?

Enoch moistened his lips. He wanted to say that the detective could easily find it out for himself, that he was the head-shepherd and would answer any question about the farm or the work. But he said instead, I don't know, baas.

—You don't know Kleinbooï was in gaol at Christmas?

—Yes, I know that, baas.

Suddenly Robbertse was on his feet, and his head almost touching the ceiling, and his body almost filling the small room, and he was shouting in a tremendous voice, then why did you lie?

Sars had shrunk back into the wall, and was looking at Robbertse out of terrified eyes, but Enoch did not move though he was deathly afraid.

He answered, I didn't mean to lie, baas. Kleinbooï was in gaol for drink, not killing.

Robbertse said, killing? Why do you mention killing?

Then when Enoch did not answer, the detective suddenly lifted his hand so that Enoch started back and knocked over the other chair. Down on his knees, and shielding his head with one hand, he set the chair straight again, saying, baas, we know that you are here because the master was killed.

But Robbertse's lifting his hand had been intended only to remove his hat from his head, and now with a grin he put his hat on the table.

—Why fall down, he asked, because I take off my

hat? I like to take off my hat in another man's house.

He smiled at Sara, and looking at the chair now set upright, said to her, you can sit.

When she made no attempt to sit on it, the smile left his face, and he said to her coldly and menacingly, you can sit.

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When she had sat down, he said to Maarman, don't knock over any more chairs. For if one gets broken, you'll tell the magistrate I broke it, won't you? That I lifted it up and threatened you?

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—No, baas.

Robbertse sat down again, and studied his book as though something were written there, not the names of shepherds. Then he said suddenly, out of nothing, you hated him, didn't you?

And Enoch answered, no, baas.

—Where's your son Johannes?

—In Cape Town, baas.

—Why didn't he become a shepherd?

—I wouldn't let him, baas.

—You sent him to the white University?

—Yes, baas.

—So that he could play the white baas?

—No, baas.

—Why does he never come to see you?

—The Big Baas would not let him, baas.

—Because he wouldn't become a shepherd?

—Yes, baas.

—So you hated him, didn't you?

—No, baas.

Robbertse looked at him with contempt.

—A man keeps your own son away from your door, because you want a better life for him, and you don't hate him? God, what are you made of?

He continued to look at Maarman with contempt, then shrugged his shoulders as though it were a bad business; then he suddenly grew intimate, confidential, even friendly.

—Maarman, I have news for you, you may think it good, you may think it bad. But you have a right to know it, seeing it is about your son.

The shepherd was suddenly filled with a new apprehension. Robbertse was preparing some new blow. That was the kind of man he was, he hated to see any coloured man holding his head up, he hated to see any coloured man anywhere but on his knees or his stomach.

—Your son, said Robbertse, genially, you thought he was in Cape Town, didn't you?

—Yes, baas.

—Well, he isn't, said Robbertse, he's here in Poort, he was seen there yesterday.

He let it sink in, then he said to Maarman, he hated Big Baas Flip, didn't he?

Maarman cried out, no, baas.

For the second time Robbertse was on his feet, filling the room with his size, and his madness.

—He didn't hate him? he shouted. God Almighty, Big Baas Flip wouldn't let him come to his own home, and see his own father and mother, but he didn't hate him.

And you didn't hate him either, you creeping yellow bastard, what are you all made of?

He looked at the shepherd out of his mad red eyes. Then with contempt he said again, you creeping yellow Hottentot bastard.

—Baas, said Maarman.

—What?

—Baas, the baas can ask me what he likes, and I shall try to answer him, but I ask the baas not to insult me in my own house, before my own wife.

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Robbertse appeared delighted, charmed. Some other white man might have been outraged that a coloured man should so advise him, but he was able to admire such manly pride.

—Insult you? he said. Didn't you see me take off my hat when I came into this house?

He turned to Sara and asked her, didn't you see me take off my hat when I came into the house.

—Yes, baas.

—Did you think I was insulting your husband?

—No, baas.

Robbertse smiled at her ingratiatingly. I only called him a creeping yellow Hottentot bastard, he said.

The cruel words destroyed the sense of piquancy for him, and now he was truly outraged. He took a step towards the shepherd, and his colleague, the other detective, the silent one, suddenly shouted at him, Robbertse!

Robbertse stopped. He looked vacantly at Maarman.

—Was someone calling me? he asked. Did you hear a voice calling me?

Maarman was terrified, fascinated, he could see the red foam. He was at a loss, not knowing whether this



was madness, or madness affecting to be madness, or what it was.

—The other baas was calling you, baas.

Then it was suddenly all over. Robbertse sat down again on the chair to ask more questions.

—You knew there was money stolen?

—Yes, baas.

—Who told you?

—Mimi, the girl who works at the house.

—You knew the money was in an iron safe, and they took it away?

—Yes, baas.

—Where would they take it to?

—I don't know, baas.

—Where would you have taken it, if you had stolen it?

But Maarman didn't answer.

—You won't answer, eh?

All three of them watched Robbertse anxiously, lest the storm should return. But he smiled benevolently at Maarman, as though he knew that even a coloured man must have pride, as though he thought all the better of him for it, and said, all right, I won't ask that question. But I want you to think of the places where that safe could be. It must have been carried by at least two men, perhaps more. And they couldn't have got it off the farm in the time. So it's still on the farm. Now all I want you to do is to think where it could be. No one knows this farm better than you.

—I'll think, baas.

The other detective suddenly said, *the lieutenant's come*. The two of them stood just inside the door,